

PURPLE SILK MUSIC EDUCATION FOUNDATION

THE LEGACY OF SHERLYN CHEW

The legacy of an organization is often tied to the legacy of an individual. Purple Silk Music Education Foundation (PSMEF) has been synonymous with Sherlyn Chew, its founder and artistic director since 1995.

A CLOSET FULL OF INSTRUMENTS

Sherlyn was born in Oakland into a family steeped in traditional Chinese music. After graduating from UC Berkeley and studying and performing abroad, she returned to Oakland to teach music in both Lincoln Elementary School, her alma mater, and in nearby Laney College. It was a 1995 event, attending her former music teacher's funeral in Southern California, that destined her to establish PSMEF. While helping the widow sort her late husband's belongings, Chew discovered a closet full of traditional Chinese instruments purchased years ago by the teacher for the unrealized purpose of creating a Chinese orchestra in California. That fateful event mandated that she fulfill the hope of her late teacher as well as rise to the artistic needs of her community and state. In response to the loss of arts education and music programs in public school as a result of Proposition 13 and other economic factors, Sherlyn battled the odds and founded PSMEF.

APPRECIATION THROUGH INSTRUCTION

It is worthwhile to explore the organization's mission statement: "PSMEF is an Oakland-based nonprofit that supports music education for inner-city youth. Our mission is to instill in young people an appreciation of music from all cultures through instruction in traditional

Chinese instruments. We promote opportunities for children and youth of low-income families to receive music education from professional musicians, perform in public venues and become proficient musicians themselves."

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS, EXPANDING REACH



PSMEF uniquely reflects the ethnic makeup of the Bay Area in California. While solidly

based in the Chinese American community and neighborhood of Oakland, its reach has expanded in a healthy and harmonious manner to include significant partnerships with the African American and Latino communities. Starting from humble beginnings at Lincoln Elementary School in the heart of Oakland's under-served Chinatown, PSMEF inaugurated the Purple Bamboo Orchestra and Chorus, which is still going strong and receives grant support from the Artists in Schools program of the California Arts Council. PSMEF also established the Great Wall Youth Orchestra and Chorus, consisting primarily of advanced and older members of the younger group, as well as new students who attend the Saturday Laney College classes.

GREAT WALL YOUTH ORCHESTRA AND CHORUS

Great Wall Youth Orchestra and Chorus has, among many venues, performed with the Oakland East Bay Symphony, played at half-time during Golden State Warriors basketball games, and recently toured the Pacific Northwest with performances in Portland, Spokane and Vancouver.



The multicultural makeup of the Bay Area is intriguingly reflected through examples of PSMEF past and present offerings. The ever-expanding repertoire of the group currently includes 25 Chinese folk tunes and 11 selections from other parts of the world – 18 of these are featured in their recent CD entitled *Joyful Journey*. Tyler Thompson, the African American youth who premiered with PSMEF at the age of 9, continues to shine as an example of a cross-cultural phenomenon. The International Community School in East Oakland, whose population is 76% Latino, has also become a significant recruiting source of young musicians for PSMEF.



Although Sherlyn Chew has retired from teaching at both Lincoln Elementary and the International Community School since the summer of 2006, she continues to teach at Laney College nearby, where elementary students may earn college credit in, naturally,

Chinese music. Today, Sherlyn remains dedicated to Purple Silk and Great Wall as artistic director while ceding managerial directorship and leadership over Purple Bamboo Orchestra and Chorus at Lincoln to Victor Siu, her longtime protégé.

JOYFUL JOURNEY

It is appropriate to say that Ms. Chew's life has thus far been a joyful journey in arts and music education, and in the promotion of cross-cultural understanding. Her work has enriched the lives of thousands of youth in the Bay Area as well as brought national and international recognition of PSMEF. The California Arts Council salutes her contributions to the arts of our state, and is honored to be among supporters of her life-long work.

Much more may be learned about Purple Silk Music Education Foundation from its extensive website www.purplesilk.org.

Purple Silk has received support from several grant programs of the California Arts Council. It is currently funded in the Artists in Schools (AIS) program, which promotes arts learning in public and non-profit schools from kindergarten to twelfth grade. The next deadline for the AIS program is March 6, 2009. An online application will be available by December 15, 2008. For detailed information, please contact Wayne Cook at (916) 322-6344 or wcook@cac.ca.gov, or John Seto at (916) 322-6395 or jseto@cac.ca.gov, or visit our website, www.cac.ca.gov.

